

The Managed Heart

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On a 15-hour flight from Hong Kong to New York, a young businessman puts his drink down, leans back and takes in a flight attendant, who is pushing a 300-pound meal cart on its third voyage up the aisle. "Hey, Honey," he calls out, "give me a smile." The flight attendant stops the cart, wipes her brow and looks him in the eye. "I'll tell you what," she says. "You smile first, then I'll smile. O.K.?" The businessman smiles at her. "Good," she replies. "Now freeze and hold that for 15 hours." And she turns to push the cart up the aisle. The smiling passenger got more than he asked for—he got the flight attendant's real feeling. Which was this: "The company may sell my smile to you in an ad. And reading that ad, you may think you have bought the right to my smile. But it's for me to decide when I smile, because it's my face." Details come and go when a story is as worn with the telling and as relished as this one. In some versions of this smile war the flight attendant works for United; in others, TWA or World Airways. In some versions the businessman says, "What's the matter, not smiling today?" or "Baby, where's my smile?" In some versions the man is old, in others young. But in all the times I've heard this story, one detail goes unchanged. It is always a man who claims the smile and always a woman's smile that he claims. For the businessman, that smile holds a promise—not so much of her interest in him as a man, perhaps, as of her interest in him as a child with a need for care. Behind the "Hey, honey" is perhaps his unnamed dread that the whole supply of female nurturance is drying up around him.

Long before the current labor struggles in the airline industry, sensitive observers could have seen the trouble coming: they could have read it in the flight attendants' faces. Ever since deregulation sent the airlines into a competitive frenzy, the companies have asked flight attendants to shoulder an increasingly heavy share of winning in the marketplace. Like workers on an assembly line that has been speeded up, flight attendants have been asked to hand out commercial love at an ever faster rate, to more people in the same amount of time.

Unable to keep up, attendants have countered with a slowdown. They could not slow down their actual physical labor—they had to serve meals in the flight time allotted—but they could slow down their emotional labor. And, in a way not quite articulated, that is what they have been doing. Passengers no longer get the steady, good-hearted cheer promised ever more boldly by smiling young women in ads.

"Flight attendants never even look at me as they go by," one woman complained. "I figure it's because I'm a woman and they figure I'm not a big business customer." In fact, something else is going on. As one flight attendant explained, "We keep our eyes down. We avoid eye contact and focus on the aisle, on the plates. I know the guy in 7-B is patiently waiting to catch my eye and ask for another Coke. But we can't do a cocktail and meal service for 200 passengers in two and a quarter hours and take special requests, too. I'd like to, but I'm like a dispensing machine as it is. How can I give personal service the way it is now?"

For decades, flight attendants have been mothering frightened passengers. With the

breakdown of this familiar service system over the past ten years, we can see the form of exploitation on which it has depended: the exploitation of emotional labor—the managing of hearts for the company good.

One crisp autumn week, I went to the Flight Attendant Training Center of Delta Air Lines in Atlanta, Georgia, to see how they prepared people to do emotional labor. The center was near the Atlanta airport, not far from the airplane hangars that new recruits toured. Each day of the four-week training course began at eight a.m. in a large assembly hall with talks by an array of supervisors, pilots, company officials. The trainees—123 of them, nearly all white females in their early 20s—sat nervously with notepads in their laps.

Where were the blacks? I thought. Where were the men? Why is this a white woman's job? It is white, one of the few black flight attendants suggested to me, because Delta caters to what it takes to be a prejudiced white traveling public. It is female, she explained, because women and "friendly service" go together, especially in a nonunion company in the South. The young woman sitting to my left, like many others, felt lucky to be chosen: "This sure beats workin' a desk job in Memphis. That's where I come from. All my girlfriends are working as secretaries or having babies. They think I'm real liberated to be here."

The program proved to be harder than they had thought. Quizzes came daily—on what to do if you see a passenger slumped over; on the location of the oxygen masks on the L-1011, on the 767; on whether to board a handcuffed convict; on how to inflate the life rafts. They had been told that if they didn't measure up in any way, many eager applicants were waiting to replace them. In the hall that morning there were nervous, sidelong glances and hushed talk. Finally a pilot, crew-cut, in his mid-50s, walked with a slow authoritative stride to the microphone, paused and looked around. After a few good morning remarks, he came to the point: "The pilot commands the plane, wing to wing and nose to tail. Now," he said in a thick Southern drawl, "if you girls have any trouble in the cabin that you can't handle, you take it to your A-line [the flight attendant in charge], and if she can't handle it, she should come to me. Now if you're the A-line you take time to collect yourself. You go powder your nose in the ladies' room. Then come in the cockpit and politely say, 'Captain? I hate to disturb you but I think we have a problem.'"

Having first established the emotional labor due him, he went on to describe what was due the passengers. "Now, girls, I want to tell you something else," he said moving slowly, with authority. "I want you to think of the cabin as the living room in your very own home. At home, wouldn't you go out of your way to make friends feel at ease and have a good time? Well, it's the same thing in the L-1011." Then he said what other pilots were to repeat after him: "Girls, I want you to smile. Your smile is your best asset. So I want you to go out there and use it. Smile. Really lay it on. Smile." The young woman from Memphis wrote in her notebook, "Must smile—impt."

If a passenger is "demanding" or "drinking too much," the flight attendants were told in a later session, "think of him as a child. Maybe he's afraid of flying." From the trainer's point of view, all this is just a sensible way to generate commercial affection—evoking the warm feelings flight attendants have for children, for friends, for

people they would invite into their own homes and give smiles to easily, naturally. The trainers are not unpleasant people with malicious intentions. On the contrary, the trainers I saw conducting the classes from eight to five each day were helpful, friendly women who had been and probably would again be flight attendants themselves.

I have many times thought, since meeting her, of the center's director, a distinguished woman in her early 50s. She had a tough exterior that kept trainees in awe and allowed her to be at ease with the nearly solidly male management above her. (Her job, she had been told, was to *quarterback* the training division. Now that's language to make a woman feel right at home.) But her gentleness and thoughtfulness shone through; a small table by her desk was crammed with photos of former trainees, some with new husbands and babies—her “family.” She was there at 7:30 every morning, keeping an eye out, ripples of laughter surrounding her from time to time as she cracked jokes, shoring up morale, year after year after year. Like the flight attendants themselves, she and the other trainers seemed to me deeply decent people.

At the same time, something struck me as terribly wrong with the whole commercial logic they had been drawn into—a logic that uses Southern white womanhood as a marketing gimmick, that trades in female niceness. When young recruits, armed with mental images of passengers as children and friends, actually begin work, the experience is often a shock. Yes, a drunk may fear flying, poor fellow, but what if he has his hand between your legs? What if he's cursing at you? What if he's putting out his cigarette on your arm? These things happen. And in recessionary times, when people are coping with more failures in their personal lives, these things happen more often.

The technique of seeing a passenger through images that bring him closer and help you empathize gets in the way of quickly depersonalizing him when he does not act like a child or a friend in your home. The trainers helped workers learn how to extend their empathy to strangers. But they didn't want to discourage their young trainees by telling it like it is, or make them too uppity by spelling out what abuse they were paid to withstand and what they were not. The trainers taught flight attendants how to send out their feelings but not how to take them back.

Flight attendants who worked during the 1960s speak nostalgically of times when there was one worker to 25 passengers, when planes were smaller and slower, when layovers were longer and flights less crowded, and some personal attention was actually possible. Once a cruise ship, the airplane has become a Greyhound bus. During the recession of the early 1970s, many airlines began “cost-efficient” flying. They began using planes that could hold more people and fly longer without fuel stops. That meant longer workdays and more workdays bunched together. Flight attendants had less time to adjust to time-zone changes on layovers and less time to enjoy a major attraction of their work: personal travel.

One measure of cost-efficiency has always been how long the plane is kept in the air. Now, like the airplane, the flight attendant is kept in use as long and as intensively as possible. One American Airlines union official describes the speedup: “They rush us through the emergency briefing. They're even briefing us on the buses getting out there. When you get on the plane, you just start counting all the food and everything and start loading the passengers. They'll shut the door and pull away and we'll find we're 20 meals short.”

It is as if a giant conveyor belt carrying human beings has begun to move faster. There is no longer one flight attendant to 25 passengers; there is now about one to 50.

With deregulation in the early 1970s and a subsequent but short-lived drop in fares, the “discount people” boarded: more mothers with small children who left behind nests of toys, gum wrappers and food scraps; more elderly, “white-knuckle” flyers; and more people who did not know where the restrooms were or who wandered around wanting to go “downstairs.” The flight attendant was called on to do far more, with far less time to do it.

The current recession has made matters worse. Some airlines have laid off baggage handlers, gate personnel, ticket clerks and managers. Lines are longer. More bags are lost. Connecting flights are missed. Mishaps multiply. Most passengers can take a moderate number of mishaps with moderate good grace. But one passenger in, say, every 100 is a grumbler who needs to fix blame on someone—usually the flight attendant. Taking blame from such grumblers makes up a large part of the attendant's workday. A passenger's frustration at a missed connection, mixed with the usual anxiety about air travel, can erupt as an angry complaint about the food. Eyes ablaze, a man may suddenly glare at a flight attendant and shout, “This meat is not *cooked!*”

Flight attendants have a name for the blaze-eyed man. He is an “irate,” a term attendants use as a noun, as in, “Irene, I had three irates this morning.” In flush times, a flight attendant can soothe her irates with a free drink or deck of cards, but on some airlines those frills are gone. Only extra friendly service is left to appease the ever longer stream of irates, frustrated by baggage handlers, ticket agents, late flights, missed flights and the fact that the passenger in the next seat got a ticket for \$100 less by buying at the right hour of the right day.

With so much riding on service, airlines—now a highly competitive and volatile industry—keep a keen eye on their relative ratings. They wait for Egon Ronay's yearly *Lucas Guide* with the eagerness of networks waiting for Nielsen ratings. This white-and-green paperback, available in many airport drugstores and geared to traveling businessmen (ads for sherry and cigars often adorn the pages), lets the airlines and their passengers know who's ahead in the intercompany smile wars.

A *Lucas Guide* ranking of Delta Airlines says, “[Drinks were served] not only with a smile but with concerned inquiries such as, ‘Anything else I can get you, Madam?’ The atmosphere was that of a civilized party—with the passengers, in response, behaving like civilized guests. . . . Once or twice our inspectors tested stewardesses by being deliberately exacting, but they were never roused, and at the end of the flight they lined up to say farewell with undiminished brightness. . . . [Passengers are] quick to detect strained or forced smiles, and they come aboard wanting to *enjoy* the flight. One of us looked forward to his next trip on Delta ‘because it was fun.’ Surely that is how passengers ought to feel.”

Being friendly or enjoying your work is one thing, but having your enjoyment advertised, promised—in essence, sold—is quite another. A recent Delta ad featuring a close-up of a pretty smiling woman advertised “people [who] love their work.” The ad coyly explained the glow of her smile: “And if you're wondering where all this comes from, well, it comes from inside.” And one PSA slogan bragged, “On PSA, our smiles are not just painted on. . . . So smile your way from L.A. to San Francisco.”

By creating expectations, advertisements in effect rewrite the job description, since part of the job is to cope with what people expect and enjoy it. Ads promise on-time service though planes are late up to 50 percent of the time. Ads picture half-empty planes and leisurely service. Ads imply prompt, quiet, smoke-free flights in comfortable seats with reading lights that work. In promising all this, ads create an extra job—dealing with the inevitable disgruntlement of passengers who sit out a half-hour delay in crowded seating, contemplating the connection they are going to miss. The smile in the ad makes the passengers view ordinary nonsmiling as facial loafing. Across the pages of one magazine after another, the happy worker of one company competes with the still happier worker of another. And the ads of both diverge ever more wildly from the hard work this smiling really is.

The connection between profits, service and self—the commercial logic of the managed heart—is not slipped quietly over the workers' heads. The company tries to bring the workers in on it. One male worker, who had seven years' experience resisting this logic at United Airlines, observed: "We get told how we're doing. Periodically we get sent passenger evaluations. They show how United, American, Continental and TWA are competing. The passengers are asked to rank the flight attendants: 'Genuinely concerned, made me feel welcome. Spoke to me more than required. Was wide awake, energetic and eager to help. Seemed sincere when talking to passengers. Helped establish a relaxed cabin atmosphere. Enjoyed their jobs. Treated passengers as individuals.' We see how United is doing in the competition. We're supposed to really get into that."

Why did this flight attendant resist the performance questionnaire? Not because he believed capitalism had no right to program and sell a person's feelings. He had not thought things out that far; anyway, it's nothing to think about when a recession is on and he's lucky to have work. No, he resisted having his friendliness rated because he couldn't be sincerely friendly to 700 people a day. And while he took the job far less seriously and gave it much less than many women workers I talked with, even he wanted to be sincerely friendly. He withdrew only when sheer numbers made that impossible.

In response to any industry speedup, workers experience stress. A company base manager at Delta used that term as she explained frankly, "The job is getting harder. There's no question about it. We see more sick forms. We see more cases of situational depression. We see more alcoholism and drugs, more trouble sleeping and relaxing."

Flight attendants I talked to said stress comes when they are faced with a rapid flow of demands but have little power over the conditions that would help them meet those demands. They can't make passenger requests disappear. They can't leave. They feel torn—and they feel helpless to stop the flow of demands that make them feel torn.

I was having dinner one evening with a flight attendant, seven years with Delta, who tried to get across what it feels like:

"I had this woman complain to me—bitterly—that the seat was small, that her bag didn't fit under it as it did on other airlines. And she was mad at me for that. I was trying to deal with her when a guy came up to complain his earphones didn't work. I offered to give him new ones but he was still mad. Then at the end of the trip, this man sitting opposite my jump seat began staring at me and finally propositioned me. 'How

much do you charge?' he asked. He made me feel like a prostitute. Maybe I could have handled any one of these episodes without getting upset. But they happened one after another, one after another. I had different feelings about each one. But I didn't get a chance to work out my feelings before —*bang*—the next thing happened."

Another worker told me how she reached her breaking point: "I thought I'd heard them all. I had a lady tell me her doctor gave her a prescription for playing cards. I had a man ask me to tell the pilot to use the cockpit radio to reserve his Hertz car. I had a lady ask me if we gave enemas on board. But the time I finally cracked was when a lady just took her tea and threw it on my arm. That was it."

Another flight attendant, who took pride in her resiliency and love of people and who felt she had grown in both areas during her ten years at Pan Am, also reached the point at which she could not continue: "I guess it was on a flight when a lady spat at me that I decided I'd had enough. I tried. God knows, I tried my damndest."

We know what the old kind of exploitation looks like: an assembly-line worker, bent over his machine, works long hours in terrible conditions for desperately low wages. But there is another kind—the exploitation of service workers, many of them women, and it looks markedly different. The labor it demands is less physical than emotional, less in the hands than in the managed heart. And the occupational hazards of this work are not back injuries or cataracts but emotional stress and burnout.

A surprising number of modern workers are, in a sense, flight attendants: as part of their jobs, they manage their clients' feelings and, in doing so, they manage their own. Some have brief encounters with many people—radio and television announcers, waitresses and waiters, hotel receptionists. Some have more prolonged contact—hairdressers, social workers, dental hygienists. And some have extended, close contact—therapists, nurses, doctors, teachers.

Just as the airlines invite customers to rate service, so too, other companies come up with ways of making sure their employees do their emotional work. An article headlined "A Grumpy Winn-Dixie Clerk Could Make You a Dollar Richer" ran in the *St. Petersburg Times* on April 17, 1982: "The cashiers at six St. Petersburg and Pinellas Park Winn-Dixie stores are wearing dollar bills pinned to their uniforms these days. It's all part of a company courtesy campaign. If the cashier doesn't come up with a friendly greeting and a sincere thank you, the customer is supposed to get a dollar. And a cashier who gives away too many dollars may wind up with a lecture from the boss."

As the shift from an industrial to a service economy continues, less and less will people make things for a living and more and more will they deliver services that require face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact. A capacity to deal with things will matter relatively less on the job, while the capacity to deal with people, relationships and feelings will matter relatively more. In a capitalist, postindustrial culture, what this means, I think, is that a commercial logic will penetrate deeper and deeper into what we used to think of as a private, psychological, sacred part of a person's self and soul.

Emotional labor is the silent work of evoking and suppressing feeling—in ourselves and in others. When you drive a truck or swing a hammer for a living, you give the company your time and sweat. But you don't relinquish your way of seeing things. You don't give the company your face or your feelings. Those aren't used. Those

aren't exploited. But when you do emotional labor to express the company's disposition toward the public, and to make a profit for the company, you put your feelings to work.

What an employer actually sees and buys, of course, is what you can *see*—how we seem. To maintain that outward appearance, people use one of two techniques of professional acting. The first is surface acting—the putting on of an outward appearance. A social worker, say, might lean over slightly, head tilted, with a closed smile to express the official feeling—concern. But surface acting carries us only so far. In the long run, it is hard to feel one thing while seeming to feel another. What lasts longer is the acting that Konstantin Stanislavsky proposed: what I call deep acting. To do deep acting, we actually evoke in ourselves the feelings we need in order to seem to feel the right feeling for the job. The social worker, then, might think of a surly client as the mother of a boy she knows down the street and in this way evoke the empathy she needs for the job.

If a service worker learns how to do deep acting, to evoke and retract the appropriate images and metaphors at the appropriate time, if she can extend herself when a client is friendly but contract herself when the client isn't, if she is good at detecting who is likely to be which, then she can minimize the stress. But she may come to recognize that she is acting, and that the actor is both the "real" her and not the "real" her. And she can become confused and troubled over which is which. The issue of false-ness came up again and again as I interviewed flight attendants. They often said to me, "Oh, I'm not a phony, but . . ." or "X is a real phony, but, now, I feel like myself in the cabin." Some seemed to blame themselves for what was really a necessity of the job: putting on an act.

While flight attendants are the actors, the airlines write the script. In an example of near-Orwellian Newspeak, the companies seem to have officially eliminated the very idea of getting angry at a passenger, the source of revenue. Supervisors never speak officially of an "obnoxious" or "outrageous" passenger, only of an "uncontrolled" passenger. The term suggests that a fact has somehow attached itself to this passenger—not that the passenger has lost control or even had any control to lose. Again, the common phrase "mishandled passenger" suggests a bungle somewhere up the line, by someone destined to remain lost in the string of workers that stretches from curbside to airplane cabin. By linguistically avoiding any attribution of blame, the companies smuggle out of discourse the very idea of a right to be angry at a passenger.

In one passenger-handling class, a trainer described how she passed a dinner tray to a man in a window seat. To do this, she had to pass it across a woman sitting on the aisle. As the tray went by, the woman snatched the man's dessert. The flight attendant politely responded, "I notice this man's dessert is on your tray." The dirty deed was done, but, the implication was, not by anyone in particular. With the help of industry language, emotional labor was done, but its tracks were hidden with words.

Seeing in company ways, the worker learns to feel in company ways that make a smile easier to sustain. But then it becomes more difficult for the worker to listen to her or his own feelings. Our own feelings may not be good feelings but they are our feelings. They tell us who we are. Yet for more workers nowadays, it's hard to tell where, in a face or a feeling, the company stops and the person begins. . . .

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Jaggar/Rothenberg.

Deference and Maternalism

Judith Rollins

The baseness of the domestic must not seem to be the result of the airs, contortions or ruses suffered under the yoke. On the contrary, the more the domestic is crushed, the more the master is justified. This is not surprising once one has understood the general phenomenon of the reversal of the accusation in all oppressive relationships.¹

The relationship between domestics and their employers is extraordinarily multi-dimensional and complex but, at its essence, I will argue, it is one of exploitation. It may appear too obvious to even state that domestic servants have always been an exploited group of workers. But I submit that this labor arrangement goes far beyond the exploitation in the economic sense in which the term is usually used. What makes domestic service as an occupation more profoundly exploitive than other comparable occupations grows out of the precise element that makes it unique: the personal relationship between employer and employee. What might appear to be the basis of a more humane, less alienating work arrangement allows for a level of psychological exploitation unknown in other occupations. The typical employer extracts more than labor. This fact was suggested by the employers' preference for an individual woman over a cleaning service and the numerous statements in which employers made clear that work performance was not their highest priority in evaluating their domestics. The personality of the workers and the kinds of relationships employers were able to establish with them were as or more important considerations. As historian David Katzman has stated, "In domestic employment a personal relationship is part of the job, and the worker is hired not for her labor alone but also for her personality traits."²

Why are these aspects so important? And what, exactly, are employers seeking from these relationships? The psychological exploitation of domestics is highly significant for, I submit, it has the two essential functions of affording the employers the self-enhancing satisfactions that emanate from having the presence of an inferior and validating the employers' lifestyle, ideology, and social world, from their familial interrelations to the economically and racially stratified system in which they live.

These aspects of domestic service—these ego and system-supporting psychological functions—as well as the low-cost labor it provides may constitute part of the explanation for its immemorial and ubiquitous world history and its tenacious presence in contemporary American life. And it is in the examination of these dynamics that we can begin to identify the impact this occupation has on the social structure—an impact, I hope to show, fundamentally conservative and reproductive of hierarchical social forms.

Psychological exploitation need not be overtly harsh. It is indeed easily identifiable in deference demands, in the treatment of others as invisible or non-humans, and in the use of them as "windows to exotica." But the exploitation may be just as powerful when it is disguised in maternalism, in gift-giving, and in tolerance for irresponsibility. It is the motivation for and the belief system behind such apparently benevolent ges-

tures that make them, in fact, highly beneficial to the employer at the psychological expense of the domestic.

The psychological exploitation of female domestics by female employers is based in the two dynamics that I contend form the foundation of the relationship between the women: rituals of deference and maternalism. . . .

* hard to treat them as equal because they won't let you *

DEFERENCE

* Brunies For Maid @ TEU

Erving Goffman has defined deference as a type of ceremonial activity "which functions as a symbolic means by which appreciation is regularly conveyed to a recipient."³ Although deference may exist between status equals (called "symmetrical deference"), it is more commonly thought of, and its use in this discussion will be, "as something a subordinate owes to his superordinate."⁴ What is important about deferential behavior between non-equals is that it confirms the inequality and each party's position in the relationship to the other. If the superordinate believes the relationship to be unequal, one might ask, why are such behaviors necessary? Because one's consciousness is confirmed only by that of another; one's superior position exists only in relation to another. The inferior other must recognize the superior as such and must exhibit confirming behaviors. To do otherwise is to "disconfirm the selves of the participants" and risk eliciting a negative response from the more powerful superordinate.⁵ When the superordinate is an employer who expects elaborate forms of deference, the risk is job loss. The domestics I interviewed fully understood that the deferential performance was an integral part of the job expectations of their work.⁶

Goffman has stated that deference behaviors, as all ceremonial acts, are quite varied in character: they may be linguistic, gestural, spatial, task-embedded (related to the attitude and manner with which the individual performs tasks), or part of the communication structure (who initiates speech, speaks more frequently, receives more attention, et cetera). And deference may take the form of avoidance rituals or presentation rituals.⁷

It was not surprising that I encountered instances of all of the above forms of deference within this highly deferential occupation. Three types of linguistic deference are extremely common: most domestics are called by their first names and are expected to call their employers by their last names; both employers and domestics refer to domestics as "girls," regardless of age; and employers appreciate respectful and deferential terms like "Ma'am." . . .

How do domestics feel about being called by their first names and being referred to as "girls"? A few seemed indifferent ("No, it doesn't bother me none. That's just what people say") but most, like Odette Harris, disliked such language (a dislike, however, never expressed to employers):

I didn't like it. Why am I your "girl"? I didn't like it because it sounded like ownership. Like masters and slaves, talking about "my." . . . But you had to accept being called a "girl" and being called by your first name. You would prefer to be addressed as "Miss" but there wasn't anything you could do so you accepted it. . . . They never referred to us as "ladies." They figured it's too nice for us. We're not "ladies."

Willie
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Markward

That employers used "girl" was not unexpected; that domestics used it also was intriguing. My attempts at probing this with domestics yielded little: "Everybody says that": "I don't know. I always say 'girl.'" The explanations that were offered by domestics for their using "girl" for themselves and "lady" and "woman" for employers indicated only that they did it out of habit, conforming to the language use they heard around them. I consider their using these terms an unexamined remnant of what Fanon called the "colonized mind." Language, like other socially constructed systems, usually serves the interests of the powerful. Even when one is conscious of oppressive elements in a language, it is difficult to eliminate them from one's vocabulary. (For example, try avoiding the myriad negative uses of "black" and "dark" that form the foundation of racism in English: blacklist, blackball, the black market, a black heart, a dark day in history, the forces of darkness, a dark mood, et cetera.) The powerless may accept some of the vocabulary and definitions of the dominant society even when degrading and inaccurate; more often than not, however, they retrieve their dignity by altering definitions and operating on the basis of different values.⁸

Domestics concurred that employers enjoyed being called deferential terms like "ma'am." Recall that Margo Townsend, the director of a social service and training program for domestics, had said this was part of the reason Northern employers preferred Southern black women over Northern: "They would stipulate, 'I want a Southern girl.' They liked the 'Yes, Ma'am' and the 'Yes, Sir.' They loved that." May Lund's remarks exemplify those of all the domestics: "Before, I used to 'Yes, Ma'am' and 'Yes, Sir' them to death. No matter how much work they piled on: 'OK, all right.' They just want you to agree." . . .

My own way of discovering the power of such deferential language was revealing. Although Ms. Caton and I had agreed at our interview that I would start working for her the following week, she called me the night before I was to begin and expressed hesitancy about hiring me because "you seem so well educated." Because I had completed my first set of domestic jobs, I had, in fact, gone to this interview somewhat carelessly relaxed: I carried myself and spoke in a natural way, without the deliberately subservient manner I had feigned during my first set of job interviews (when I questioned if I could successfully pass myself off as a domestic). Because her call caused me concern about retaining the job, I arrived the following day looking especially shabby (baggy slacks, old work shirt, cotton headscarf tied Southern-style) and with an exaggeratedly subservient demeanor (standing less erect, eyes usually averted from hers, a tentativeness of movement). Most important, I said almost nothing, asked the few necessary questions in a soft unassertive voice, and responded to her directions with "Yes, Ma'am." I was rather shocked at her obvious pleasure over and total lack of suspicion about this performance, especially since she had encountered me without it the previous week. To me I felt like an absurd and transparent caricature of Stepin Fetchit; her mind, however, was clearly eased of the apprehensions she had had about my suitability for the job. She did not question the change; my behavior now expressed my belief in my inferiority in relation to her and thus my acceptance of her superiority in relation to me. Her desire for that confirmation from me was apparently strong enough to erase from her memory the contradiction of my previous behavior. . . .

This privilege of familiarity affords the employer another kind of opportunity beyond reinforcing inequality. For many, their contact with their domestic is the closest relationship they have with a lower-class or Third World person. Talking with the domestic is a chance to explore what they assume is a very different lifestyle. The domestics I interviewed reported having been asked "very personal questions"—about their finances, children, marital situations—that clearly had made them uncomfortable. Some dismissed it casually ("They're the biggest gossips in the world!") or felt it came from the women's leading lonely and boring lives. But others felt it was more significant. Nancy Clay said:

They want to know all your business so they know just where you're coming from. They tell you some of their problems so that you'll tell them your business. It's knowledge for control they want. They're uneasy if they don't know enough about you, if they don't know what you're thinking.

And May Lund attributes it to racial curiosity:

They've read or heard a lot about black people. They know we've been an oppressed people and they want to know what keeps us going. And they want to know how you handle stress, how you manage to do all you have to do. They want to know your secrets.

However, giving an answer that in some way satisfied the employer was a necessary survival strategy. No domestic reported having told an employer that what she had asked was none of her business or was something about which the domestic did not choose to talk. A few suggested they sometimes fabricated stories ("Oh, I tell her anything") but most said they answered in a way that would both satisfy the employer and protect some of their privacy. It is reasonable to assume, however, that the more powerless the domestic felt, the more she might acquiesce to the mistress' inquisitiveness and actually reveal more about her personal life than she wanted or would later choose to admit to me. Live-in workers, particularly recent migrants and the foreign-born, would be more vulnerable to this type of exploitation because of their precarious positions.

In his 1953 study of blacks in Amherst, David Chaplin, too, discovered that domestic servants "found themselves drawn into a peculiar relationship involving self-abasing exposés of the most intimate details of their private lives as part of a quite unconscious bargain with paternalistic employers. Female domestics were subject to a sort of verbal voyeurism on the part of their mistresses.⁹ And he, too, found lies to be sometimes employed to satisfy the mistresses' needs:

This situation suggested to the servants, consciously or otherwise, the possibility of playing on the sympathy or lurid imagination of their employers by elaborating and often inventing debasing anecdotes about their private lives. They were, in effect, catering to the least complimentary elements of the Negro stereotype.¹⁰

Chaplin's comments lead us to another aspect of this type of "verbal voyeurism." Beyond the fact that by asking such questions the mistresses are asserting that their superior position gives them the right to such intrusive familiarity, beyond displaying a natural curiosity about another person and culture, they may also be looking for titillation and for confirmation of their negative stereotypes about the personal lives of black

people. A part of traditional American racist stereotyping is the belief in the less inhibited social and sexual life of black people. This belief reinforces the overall image of black inferiority, since mental activity and self discipline are valued in the Western ethos while sensuality and lack of discipline are disdained.¹¹ Employers' encouragement of lively stories about domestics' personal lives both satisfies their desire for gossip and, more significantly, confirms their belief in the inferiority of black/domestic workers/the lower classes—a belief that is part of the justification of a system that maintains such people in a disadvantaged position. The use of domestics as "windows to exotica," then, is hardly the innocuous interchange it appears to be.

A related, though less prevalent, type of familiarity between the women is employers' using domestics as confidantes. Some domestics heard details of their employers' extramarital affairs; many heard about strains in employers' marriages. In the South, Elizabeth Roy's employer, after sharing the details of the causes and incidents leading to her divorce, told Ms. Roy: "I've told you things that I wouldn't even tell my mother." We were friends! When she was in trouble, I was too. When she cried, I cried." Domestics as confidantes are not rare. Former domestic Jane Louis explains it this way:

Most employers like to talk to the people who work for them because you're not in their circle, you're not going to tell anybody who's important to them. I've been like a confidante. . . . They talk to you anyplace. A white person will go up to a black stranger and tell them very private things—because they know it's not going to go.

Using a domestic as a confidante may, in fact, be evidence of the distance in even the closest of these relationships. Employers can feel free to tell domestics secrets they would not share with their friends or family precisely because the domestic is so far from being socially and psychologically significant to the employer. As physically close as the domestic may be, she is so existentially distant in the mind of the employer that the employer does not even entertain the possibility of the domestic's divulging secrets to those within the employer's social universe. And the employer does not care what the domestic thinks of her for, as Fanon suggested, a person cannot be hurt or insulted by the judgments of those she genuinely believes to be her inferior. . . .

Ingratiation behavior has been displayed by many categories of subordinate people because of dominant groups' desire for it. Domestic servants, Afro-Americans, and women are three such groups that have been encouraged to incorporate ingratiation into their encounters with employers, whites, and men, respectively. It was not surprising that a few of the domestics were ingratiating even during our interviews (all older Southern-born women) and many more described having so performed when on their jobs. I watched the personalities of two of the domestics with whom I worked change dramatically when they interacted with their employers and their employers' teenage children. I watched this performance and knew how much it hid. In interacting with employers, these women put on a mask that covered their real selves most effectively. For some domestics, Jacklyn Cock's observation is unquestionably true: "The domestic worker's main mode of adaption is the adoption of a mask of deference as a protective disguise."¹²

Throughout the literature on "Uncle Tomming" runs the debate about the degree to

which the person consciously performs without accepting its premises of inferiority or actually comes to believe its premises and thus becomes the role. This debate is a microcosmic version of the discussion among British sociologists about whether there are genuine "deferential workers"—that is, categories of workers who both behave deferentially and accept their subordinate position" as a necessary, acceptable, and even desirable part in a natural system of inequality.¹³ Both of these debates entertain the possibility that there may be some groups of people who believe that their own group is innately inferior and is justifiably on the bottom of a legitimately inequalitarian social system. Both discussions are sophisticated versions of the search for the "happy slave." Empirical efforts to find such "deferential workers" have failed.¹⁴ As they must. . . .

. . . The words "paternalism" and "maternalism" are not equivalent in their conceptual or social meanings. If paternalism is indeed part of the tradition of patriarchal authority, an authority that stretched from the household head to the kings and church leaders to God himself, there is no comparable "matriarchal authority" in the West of which maternalism is a part. Paternalism is one aspect of a political-economic-ideological power base, the aspect that relates to the exchange of patriarchal protections for service and loyalty; maternalism, on the other hand, is a concept related to women's supportive intrafamilial roles of nurturing, loving, and attending to affective needs. The very different connotations of these apparently parallel words reflect the distinct gender roles in the social structures of the West.

The importance of the employer's being female in affecting the position, tone, and dynamics of the relationship cannot be overestimated. Though the role of employer is a masculine one, a woman in the position alters the way it is both viewed and executed. . . .

All females share a secondary gender position in the society. The female employer of a domestic has lower social and familial status than her male counterpart. Her knowledge of that, her awareness of the limitations on her options because of that status, and her internalization, to whatever degree, of the legitimacy of her inferiority place her in a different position from the male employer in relation to the domestic.

Both the female employer and the female domestic have been socialized to consider themselves and other women inferior. Additionally, both women know that the female employer is not the ultimate authority in the household. Though the husband of the employer usually plays an indirect role, it may be pivotal. Recall that in every case in which an employer wanted to withhold Social Security tax, it was her husband's decision to do so. And a number of my interviewees described situations in which misunderstandings between the mistress and the domestic were reported to him for resolution. . . .

Both women's having internalized some belief about their inherent inferiority as women, both knowing there is an external power holding more social status than either of them can ever attain and holding final say over various aspects and even the existence of their arrangements, make their interrelations different from those in which one or both parties is male. The employer might herself be a material and psychological dependent. She has the luxury of identifying with power but she is not the ultimate power. Both she and the domestic know this. The domestic must show deference to an

agent of a real power; she must show deference to a second-class power figure for survival. Might the fact that the employer is "inferior" in gender and a pseudo-authority contribute to both women's and the society's low regard for the occupation of domestic servant?

And might the fact that the work is what has traditionally been "women's work" have a similar result? The low regard for this sphere of labor—whether paid or unpaid—has been well documented.¹⁵ The female employer, regardless of the degree to which she may have chosen to buy her way out of it, knows that she is seen as responsible for all household maintenance and that this is devalued work. She perceives the person she hires to do such work as doing *her* work in a way the male employer does not. The domestic is something more than an employee; she is an extension of, a surrogate for, the woman of the house. And she operates in what is increasingly the least prestigious realm of women's activities. This view of the domestic on the part of the employer—as an extension of the more menial part of herself rather than as an autonomous employee—may help to explain why the women tend to see domestic service as a more informal arrangement than other occupations.

And, more important, the employer's low regard for this "women's work" can combine with her own sexism, racism, and class prejudice to further degrade the work and the groups already subordinate in the "three structures of power" in the United States (women, people of color, and the lower classes). For some employers, like Alberta Putnam, it is incongruous to hire a man to do such work: "I would feel uncomfortable with a man in that position. I wouldn't feel right giving him orders like that. I even feel funny asking my husband to clean the dishes." For some, like Holly Woodward's husband, it is incongruous to hire a middle-class person: "Then there was Patricia, a fascinating British girl. Her father was an actor and she wasn't sure what she wanted to do. My husband was against hiring her. He told me, 'You don't want help like that around.'" And it may be assumed that for some employers—particularly in the South, Southwest, and Far West, where the servant population has been almost exclusively black, Mexican-American, Native American, and Asian-American—it is incongruous to hire a white. One can begin to see why the lower-class woman of color, just *because* of this society's sexism, racism, and class prejudice, might be psychologically the most desirable "type" for a position of servitude and why being associated with this archetypical "women's work" further degrades her—even, or perhaps especially, in the eyes of her female employer. The employer benefits from the degradation because it underscores the power and advantage (easily interpreted as the rightness) of being white and middle-class.

And the employer simultaneously contributes to the continuation of gender subordination in the society: by hiring another woman to do her work, she solves the problems of the tediousness of housework and (if she is employed) of women having "double duty" in a way that does not challenge patriarchal ideas of appropriate "women's work." None of my interviewees—not the young Ph.D.'s any more than the older employers who had never worked—was pressuring her husband to take more household responsibility. For these women, the masculist idea that housework is "women's work" remained unchallenged. They were willing to take full advantage of the class and racial inequities generated by this social system to mitigate against their gender disadvantage.

It is clearly significant that the domestic represents the employer in the most devalued area of the employer's activities. If, indeed, she sees the domestic as an extension of herself, it is of her least capable and least "feminine" self. Any identification the employer has with the domestic is a negative identification. The menial, unintelligent, physically strong, irresponsible, weak-charactered servant provides a convenient contrast figure upon whom might be projected those aspects of herself most despised and feared. As stated, for this kind of role, the lower-class black domestic, removed from the employer by class, culture, and color, might be particularly useful.¹⁶

Another important consequence of both parties' being women is the fact that the success of the arrangement is measured by both more in terms of the quality of the relationship than the practical work aspects. Comments like those of domestic Elizabeth Roy and employer Karen Edwards were common:

The worst thing that can happen in domestic work is a poor understanding with your employer. A bad relationship makes the work that much harder. That's it; a bad relationship. Then you've really got a hard job. You dread it. (Ms. Roy)

I want reliability, honesty, niceness. The quality of the work is probably the least important thing. (Ms. Edwards)

That women's value system and morality are different from men's has been demonstrated by a number of writers.¹⁷ Though explanations of this vary, the conclusions are consistent: women are more empathetic, caring, service-oriented, relationship oriented, and concerned with others' feelings. Women "judge themselves in terms of their ability to care" and the "feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people."¹⁸ This tendency to emphasize relationships helps explain why many employers and domestics placed a higher value on working with an amiable and pleasant person than on more practical aspects of the work situation. (As would be expected, this attitude was more pervasive with domestics than with employers, and more true of employers who wanted childcare, were not working, or were widowed than those not needing childcare or companionship from the domestic.) But this "caring" and "empathy" that are unquestionably a part of the maternalism from employer to domestic must be scrutinized carefully.

The maternalism dynamic is based on the assumption of a superordinate-subordinate relationship. While maternalism may protect and nurture, it also degrades and insults. The "caring" that is expressed in maternalism might range from an adult-to-child to a human-to-pet kind of caring but, by definition (and by the evidence presented by my data), it is not human-to-equal-human caring. The female employer, with her motherliness and protectiveness and generosity, is expressing in a distinctly feminine way her lack of respect for the domestic as an autonomous, adult employee. While the female employer typically creates a more intimate relationship with a domestic than her male counterpart does, this should not be interpreted as meaning she values the human worth of the domestic any more highly than does the more impersonal male employer. Her ideas about the domestic are not different; her style and her needs are. . . .

My interviewees' statements make it clear that this remains an important part of employers' conceptualizations of domestics. For example, when describing a time when her housecleaner criticized her for working outside the home, Jocelyn Minor said:

I remember there was a kind of veiled reproach. I said to her, "What will you do after you get married?" She said, "Oh, I'm going to stay home. I believe a wife should stay home after she marries." And I'm quite certain that was meant as a reproach. But I didn't take it seriously. I regarded her as an ignorant child.

How old was she?

About twenty-two going on ten. . . .

Viewing the domestic as childlike justifies treating her maternally. Her acceptance of such treatment "proves" she deserves the treatment, which further justifies the attitude. But it should be kept in mind that the employer has the power in this relationship (enhanced by her greater power by virtue of race and class in the society); the domestic behaves as she must in order to survive. She must accept maternalistic treatment as surely as she must accept being relegated to the kitchen and verbal familiarities that are offensive. These conventions are all very much a "part of the job."

Expressions of maternalism that were related to me included giving gifts, the loaning of money, explaining bills, demanding to meet and approve friends, making business calls for the employee, making travel arrangements for her, and (in the South) interceding on her behalf with the legal system. Because the giving of gifts—especially old clothes—has been an integral part of the domestic service experience all over the world and because it persists today as one of the unique "benefits" of household work, a closer examination of this phenomenon, this ubiquitous expression of maternalism, is considered appropriate.

Ava Pearson's way of operating was typical of employers: "I am an easy person to work for. I'm not hard to get along with and I think that's part of their compensation. But I always gave Alice gifts—old children's clothes, pieces of furniture. And, of course, there was the Christmas bonus." And May Lund's response to such generosity was typical of domestics:

This woman was always giving me her old size five-and-a-half shoes. I wear an eight! But my mother always said, and she did domestic work for years, she said, "No matter what they give you, you take it because one day they're going to give you something worth having." And I dragged those damned five-and-a-half *double A* shoes home! I'd give them to somebody else or throw them away. . . .

Domestics do, indeed, "take . . . whatever they give"—and not only because it might be useful. Domestics know that gifts, like other expressions of maternalism, *must* be accepted. And, further, as Ellen Samuel points out, they know they must appear grateful . . .

I didn't want most of that junk. But you have to take it. It's part of the job, makes them feel like they're being so kind to you. And you have to *appear* grateful. That makes them feel good too. . . .

On some level, the women involved in this one-way gift-giving are aware that it reinforces the inequality of the relationship. It strengthens and provides evidence for the view of the relationship the employer, the initiator of the gifts, prefers—that it is a relationship between a superior and her inferior. For this purpose, it is far more useful

than giving a comparable amount in wages. (In fact, raising the wages, another medium of exchange, could threaten to weaken the employer's belief in the inferiority of the domestic; for does not the fact that she will work for low wages help prove her inferiority? "To pay more in cash would be to admit the greater worth of the servant, to give more in kind retains the servant as a dependant whilst reducing his moral worth."¹⁹) Thus the pervasiveness of gift-giving in domestic service: it, like the many forms of deference demanded and the other manifestations of maternalism, serves to reify the differences between the women—be they in terms of class, race, or human worth. . . .

The purpose of this maternalism is *not* to nurture and enhance growth (as is that, for instance, toward the employer's real children). The main function of the maternalism from employer to domestic is the confirmation of the inferiority of the domestic (and, by extension, her class and racial group). . . .

Because the stealing and drinking supported the negative stereotypes about the lower classes and black people, the presence of such weak-charactered employees benefitted the employers by making them feel superior. Such an employee does more psychologically for her employers than any efficient but dignified domestic ever could.

Just as "it is the anti-Semite who *makes* the Jew" and "it is the racist who creates his inferior," indeed, it is the mistress with her class and racial preconceptions who creates the obsequious, incompetent servant. And for the same reason. The anti-Semite, the racist, and the mistress (obviously not mutually exclusive categories) want the despised others to exist as they have defined them in order to define their own identity as superiors. To maintain the presence of an inferior is to create a setting for the constant enhancement of one's ego by means of the inevitable comparison.

David Katzman, who has done one of the finest historical books on American servitude, recognizes this attraction to the inferior worker, but offers what I consider an inadequate explanation of the phenomenon:

Some women (like some men) find fulfillment in exercising power over another woman's life. Rather than seeking an intelligent, resourceful, and independent worker, they may want a servant to whom they can feel superior and dominating. Employing a domestic offers them a position of power not otherwise available to housewives.²⁰

Employing a domestic to whom one can feel superior offers far more, in my opinion, than "a position of power." And it is largely because of these non-material benefits to employers, I submit, that the occupation has existed in such diverse stratified social systems throughout the world. The presence of the "inferior" domestic, an inferiority evidenced by the performance she is encouraged to execute and her acceptance of demeaning treatment, offers the employer justification for materially exploiting the domestic, ego enhancement as an individual, and a strengthening of the employer's class and racial identities. Even more important, such a presence supports the idea of unequal human worth: it suggests that there might be categories of people (the lower classes, people of color) who are inherently inferior to others (middle and upper classes, whites). And this idea provides ideological justification for a social system that institutionalizes inequality.

This ideological function of domestic servitude is part of what has made this occu-

pation a profoundly conservative element in the varied hierarchical societies in which it has existed. This ideological function—based in rituals of deference and maternalism that are as integral to this occupation as are low pay and low prestige—cannot be overestimated in its importance to the perpetuation of the occupation and the perpetuation of a social system of class, racial, and gender stratification.

NOTES

- 1 Albert Memmi, *Dominated Man* (New York: Orion Press, 1968), p. 169.
- 2 David Katzman, "Domestic Service: Woman's Work," in *Women Working*, ed. Ann Stromberg and Shirley Harkness (Palo Alto, Calif.: Mayfield, 1978), p. 382.
- 3 Erving Goffman, "The Nature of Deference and Demeanor," *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956): 473–502.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 479.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 475.
- 6 Some of the younger domestics were clearly struggling with this aspect of their work. May Lund, for example, has recently begun to introduce herself to prospective employers as "Mrs. Lund" and has deliberately stopped using "Ma'am."
- 7 Goffman, "Nature of Deference and Demeanor," pp. 477 and 481.
- 8 The narratives in John L. Gwaltney's *Drylongso* (New York: Vintage, 1981) illustrate aspects of the alternative value system of some Afro-Americans.
- 9 David Chaplin, "Domestic Service and the Negro," *Blue Collar World*, ed. Arthur Snostak and William Gomberg (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 540.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 See Joel Kovel, *White Racism: A Psychohistory* (New York: Vintage, 1971), ch. 6.
- 12 Jacklyn Cock, *Maids and Madams* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1980), p. 103.
- 13 David Lockwood, "Sources of Variation in Working Class Images of Society," *Sociological Review* 14, no. 3 (1966): 249–67.
- 14 In addition to Lockwood, see Cock, *Maids and Madams*, and Howard Newby, *The Deferential Worker* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979).
- 15 See Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework* (New York: Pantheon, 1974).
- 16 This psychodynamic is similar to that described by Winthrop Jordan and Joel Kovel. Both convincingly argue that blacks have been used as "contrast conceptions" to strengthen and unify white America. See Jordan, *White Over Black* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1968), and Kovel, *White Racism*.
- 17 See especially Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), and Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
- 18 Nancy Chodorow, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality," *Women, Culture and Society*, ed. Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1974), p. 44.
- 19 Michael G. Whisson and William Weil, *Domestic Servants: A Microcosm of "The Race Problem"* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1971), p. 43.
- 20 Katzman, "Domestic Service," p. 384.